

Mrs. Hall's juvenal was taken 12 miles southwest of Gabela, 17th September 1957. It is fully grown and a few adult feathers are beginning to appear on the crown and back. It is a tribute to Mrs. Hall's discernment that she was able to recognize the subspecific differences on the three crown feathers available.

Comparative wing measurements are:

<i>hallae</i>	2♂♂	95, 97
<i>poliocephala</i>	4♂♂	92-97 (94.5).
<i>carruthersi</i>	8♂♂	84-95 (87.5)
<i>akeleyae</i>	5♂♂	96-102 (98.0)
<i>kungwensis</i>	1♂	96

I would like to thank the British Museum for the loan of the juvenal from Gabela and the specimen of *kungwensis*.

### Is *Muscicapa gabela* an Akalat?

by B. P. HALL

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A recent exchange with the Chicago Natural History Museum has given the British Museum an example of *Muscicapa gabela* Rand (1957, Fieldiana 39: 41), a species discovered by Heinrich in secondary forest 15km south of Gabela, western Angola. The rich bright brown of the upperparts and the long legs distinguish *gabela* from all African members of *Muscicapa*, as Rand pointed out, and in subsequent correspondence he has said that he is not wholly satisfied that it was correctly ascribed to this genus.

I believe that *gabela* is not a Flycatcher but an Akalat, and the representative in western Angola of *Sheppardia*, a genus found sporadically in both lowland and montane forest throughout tropical Africa, apparently frequenting the same sort of tangled undergrowth as that in which *gabela* was found. Rand tells me that his chief reasons for not discussing *gabela* in relation to *Sheppardia* were its 'weak, slender feet and 'flycatcher' bill'. The British Museum is fortunate in having the rather rare genus *Sheppardia* well represented, including good series of *S. c. cyornithopsis* from the Cameroons, and *S. sharpei usambarae*, and these series show there is considerable variation in both these characters within the genus, and even within populations. While I agree that the legs of *gabela* are thinner (and also darker) than those of *cyornithopsis*, they can be matched in strength and size with individuals of *usambarae*, while the darker colour may be due only to freshness. Similarly in individuals of *cyornithopsis* the bill is as wide at the base, or even a trifle wider, than that of the one *gabela* examined, while all forms of *Sheppardia* have, like *gabela*, strong, forward-growing bristles.

In neither of these characters therefore is *gabela* generically distinct from the Akalats, nor can I find any other structural difference. In size it is smaller than most *Sheppardia*, with relatively shorter wings, but the measurements overlap those of *usambarae*, as the Table shows.

Similarly there are no differences in colour or pattern that seem of more than specific importance, for though on the underparts *gabela* lacks the bright orange-buff on the throat and breast, characteristic of other forms of *Sheppardia*, traces of an orange wash can be found in the under wing-coverts, on the chin, and in some of the olive feathers of the breast-band and flanks, showing that orange pigmentation is present but greatly

reduced. Indeed *usambarae* shows a close approach to *gabela* below, having also an olive breast-band and flanks, but having a dull orange wash on the throat and breast which overlies the olive, making the contrast between the throat and breast less marked than in *gabela*.

In colour the upper parts of *gabela* are close to *cyornithopsis*: the head and mantle are slightly more rufous, less olive, but have the same minute dark edges to the feathers which give a faintly scalloped appearance: the tail is less rufous, closer to that of *usambarae*.

Thus while *gabela* shows significant differences in both structure and colour from *Muscicapa*, it shows none from *Sheppardia*, and I recommend that it should be transferred to that genus. It should be considered as a species, *Sheppardia gabela* (Rand), with affinities to both *S. sharpei* and *S. cyornithopsis*.

The specimens have been examined with me by Derek Goodwin, R. E. Moreau and R. W. Sims, who agree with these conclusions.

TABLE OF MEASUREMENTS

	wing		bill		tail		tarsus	
	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀	♂	♀
<i>cyornithopsis</i> 10♂ 9♀	72-77	67-71	15-16	14.5-16	51-56	45-48	23-26	22-24
<i>usambarae</i> 5♂ 3♀	67-74	65	14-15	14-15	52-55	46-48	22-23	20-21
<i>gabela</i> 3♂ 2♀ (from Rand)	66-67	61-62	14-15	14	50-54	46-48	21	20-21

## Note on the relations of the species of Wagtails

by J. M. WINTERBOTTOM

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This note is prompted mainly by Irwin's interesting paper (1960). The genus *Motacilla* dates back to the Oligocene and present-day species fall into several groups. In the first, the tail is about the same length as the wing and the plumage is predominantly black and white. The number of species in this group is open to dispute, but Vaurie (1959) puts the Palaearctic forms into three species, *alba*, *grandis* and *madaraspatensis*, and considers the Ethiopian *aguimp* as conspecific with the first of these. Voous (1959) is more doubtful about this last and I would personally keep them separate. Be that as it may, it is relevant to notice that the Palaearctic forms of *alba* number eleven, whereas the Ethiopian forms number only two and *madaraspatensis*, which is really a tropical species, only just entering the Palaearctic, has no subspecies.

The second group is characterised, in most forms, by having the tail decidedly longer than the wing and by its preference for clear, running, rocky streams. There are two species, the Palaearctic *cinerea* and Ethiopian *clara*, sometimes united. The Palaearctic form is further distinguished by its yellow underparts; and it may be noted that in one Palaearctic subspecies, *M. c. robusta*, the tail is shorter than the wing. There are five subspecies of the Palaearctic *cinerea* and only three of *clara*.

The third group is characterised by having the tail decidedly shorter than the wing and a strong development of yellow. It consists of two